

AetherCon VII

CONVENTION MAGAZINE ~ 2018



FEATURED Q&As

DAVID VINCENT BAKER - LUMPLEY GAMES

CYNTHIA CELESTE MILLER - SPECTRUM GAMES

PAUL REID - RAL PARTHA EUROPE

OWEN K.C. STEPHENS - ROGUE GENIUS GAMES

PLUS MANY MANY MORE!

AetherCon VII

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TECH CREDITS



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Q&A: LUMPLEY GAMES

TYLER OMICHINSKI
INTERVIEWS
VINCENT BAKER

Tyler Omichinski: So, for someone who doesn't know, what are you and Lumpley games about?

Vincent Baker: I've been creating and publishing my own games since 2001 or so, mostly roleplaying games, but some card games, party games, and casual board games as well, and often in collaboration with my design partner, Meguey Baker. Lumpley Games is our publishing company. We sometimes publish under Meguey's Night Sky Games as well.

I'm naturally drawn to novelty and controversy in game design, so many of Lumpley Games' publications include controversial takes on ongoing topics in the field. Roleplaying games that radically restructure the creative responsibilities between players and GMs, for instance, or between players and dice, between players and designer, between players and their characters...

TO: What got you into game design?

VB: In the early 90s, right out of college, I fell in with some of Scott McCloud's circle, Scott McCloud of Understanding Comics. They were into 24-hour comics, webcomics, hardcore autobiographical comics, uncompromising creative ownership, and self-publication.

I'd been hacking and homebrewing RPGs for as long as I'd been playing them, same as so many people. For me it started with Zork when I was 8 or 9. My cousin and I would play Zork on his brother's fancy new Atari 800, but when we weren't able to, I'd pretend to be the computer and we'd roleplay it out. "You're in a hallway running east-west," I'd say. "There's a painting on the wall." I even made him talk in Zork-style commands. "No, you have to say 'examine painting' if you want to look at it!"

But so, in the early 2000s, when the small-venture publishing technology developed that allowed me to start publishing – PayPal, short-run print-on-demand, PDFs as a buyable and sellable format – I'd been primed by Scott McCloud's influence to jump in with my own experimental and autobiographical games and uncompromising creative ownership.

I hooked up with a bunch of like-minded creator-publishers at the Forge, a web-forum for creator-owned RPGs, run by creative badass Ron Edwards. We broke a lot of ground in purposeful design and independent publishing.

TO: How much do you think free website content, and more than a few free games, has contributed to your success?

VB: Success is a hard thing to make. There's no single thing you can do that gives you success. Instead, you have to do a lot of different things, some consistently over time, and some only when the opportunity arises.

I think that Meguey's and my decision to make Apocalypse World's 1st Edition PDF available for free, when we published the 2nd Edition, was a good one, for instance. I've heard from a number of people who weren't interested in Apocalypse World that the free PDFs won them over.

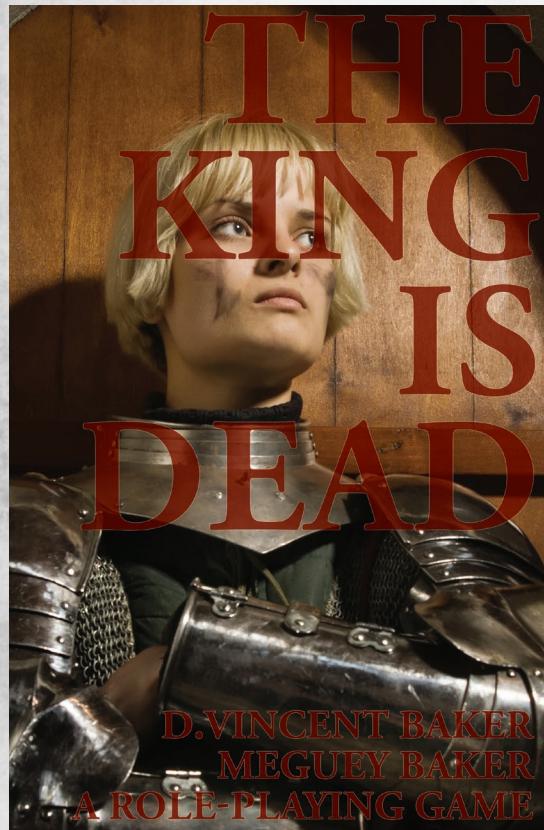
On the other hand, publishing my game Midsummer Wood for free was fun, but nobody cared. This is how it is! Building success as a self-publisher is a constant hustle. The more you can put out, the more you can attract an audience, the more you can win your audience over, the better.

TO: You've written a whole pile of essays on the topic of RPGs, running RPGs, and all the other minutia of our hobby. What do you think is the one most important lesson you've learned?

VB: It's easier to say than it is to do! It's this: make the game that people don't know they want.

Don't make the game they expect, make the game that they feel like they recognize out of nowhere. The game they didn't realize they were waiting for. To do it, you have to see through what people are evidently doing, and what they're consciously doing, to the patterns and systems that underlie them.

TO: What would you say is guiding ethos of the projects that you're currently working on?



VB: The biggest project that Meguey and I are working on currently is called Under Hollow Hills. It's about fairies, and the guiding ethos is to play with language. The game's full of wordplay, doggerel, hyperbole and understatement, allusions, metaphors taken literally, puns, sly little writerly nods.

My hope is that the playful subject matter, fairies, will work together with the playful language to disarm the game's players. We hold ourselves back, noncommittal, from play, and I hope to win over some players and give them some honest self-created laughter.

For years, I designed mostly horror games: kill puppies for satan, Poison'd, Mysterious Ghosts, even Dogs in the Vineyard and Apocalypse World have substantial elements of horror in them. For a horror game to work, you need to get the players to lower their guards, to buy into being frightened. It's fun to apply some of the lessons I learned from horror games to this whimsical, funny, romantic kind of game instead.

TO: If you had unlimited time and money, but only if you went back and completely redid one of your older games, which one would you go for?

VB: I find that as a creator I'm always impatient for what's coming in the future, not eager to go back and revisit what I've made before.

The fans want me to choose Dogs in the Vineyard, and I guess I can see their point, but they shouldn't hold their breath!

So let me choose one of my free games: Rock of Tahamaat, Space Tyrant. It's got some pretty interesting, unusual structural stuff going on in it, an arrangement of players and GM that I haven't seen anywhere else. In it, instead of having the GM play the adversary, one of the players takes on the adversarial space tyrant role, and the rest are trying to overthrow his rule, or at least survive in it, with the GM playing referee.

The game gets overlooked as a free game, I think, and a big glossy high-budget book full of gorgeous pulpy SF art could serve it well. You can find Rock of Tahamaat, Space Tyrant here, by the way: <http://lumpley.com/index.php/window/installment/2>

TO: What would you say is your favorite game that you've worked on and why?

VB: Don't make me choose! I could tell you my top five, maybe.

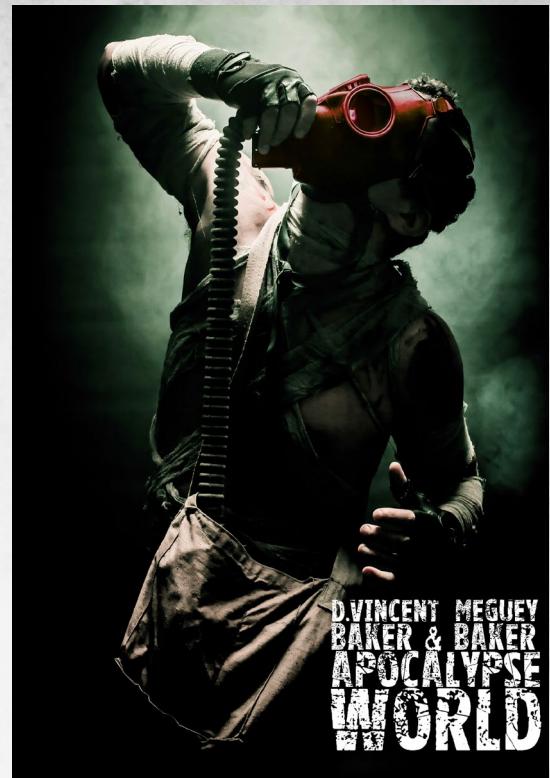
Except that today, Under Hollow Hills is the answer, for purely selfish reasons: it's being SUPER EASY to work on. I sit down at my computer and the game falls effortlessly out of my fingertips.

Now, I happen to know that all projects are also the worst, and Under Hollow Hills will get its turn as my least favorite too in time. But right now it's still the honeymoon.

TO: Do you think it is important to have an academic's approach to analyzing RPGs?

VB: Not really. I think that it's important for creators to have insights and theories about RPGs, to grapple with the game design problems that RPGs pose us. But I don't think it's important for your insights and theories to be, like, academic, or analytical, or whatever. They can live entirely in your gut if that's where they live.

I have a few friends who are honest to god RPG academics, and they find my work in RPG analysis and theory cute, I think, more than anything else. I'm just goofing off, trying to have fun with the form and figure out what works for me, same as anybody else!



Interview by Tyler Omichinski who is the writer and game designer at Broken Things.



Q&A: HAPPY MONSTER PRESS

SCOTT SANAZARO
INTERVIEWS
SCOTT DAVIS

Scott Sanazaro: Scott is a great name if I do say so myself! So Scott, why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got into tabletop RPGs?

Scott Davis: Thanks! Ah, the dreaded "tell me about yourself" question. The short version - I grew up in California, Michigan, and Ohio; I've had a pretty diverse and somewhat science fictional career involving nuclear power plants, home automation, atomic clocks, robots, lasers, and now surgical instruments; I'm husband and a father of two boys who I am proud to say are also gamers - my older son started the Dungeons and Dragons Club at our local high school. I started playing tabletop RPGs in junior high in the 1980s and played more or less continuously through college, then was diverted to other interests for a while and picked RPGs back up to play with my kids. I've been playing with various folks in my hometown of Salem, MA since 2010.

SS: Tell me a little about Happy Monster Press. What does it do? Where did the inspiration for it come from? How long has it been running? What are its goals?

SD: Happy Monster Press is a vehicle for putting some of the things I've created for RPGs out in the world. The inspiration came from feedback from my players, who thought the worlds I created were really cool and inevitably left the table wanting more. It's basically a one-man shop at the moment; I do pretty much everything except for art (and I'm working on that as well). As far as long-term goals go, I'd like to keep putting out material for the current Children of the Apocalypse setting but also expand out into other settings as well.

SS: It looks like Happy Monster Press's main setting is *Children of the Apocalypse*. Why don't you tell me a little about it?

SD: *Children of the Apocalypse* is a post-post-apocalyptic fantasy setting based in a future version of New England. By post-post-apocalyptic, I mean that the immediate disaster has passed and civilizations are rebuilding, but also that the shadow of the old civilization is ever-present. One interesting feature is Tinker Mages, who repurpose artifacts of the ancient world (our world) as magic items. So a hero might have a Bracer of Sung (Samsung Smart Watch) that helps him locate things, Boots of Nike (high top sneakers) that make him faster, and wield a Sword of Light (lightsaber). Adventurers explore the ancient ruins of our civilization, while in the background, powerful gods scheme for power.

SS: Where did your inspiration for *Children of the Apocalypse* come from?

SD: The *Children of the Apocalypse* setting started out as a way of simplifying my job as a GM. I like my worlds to have at least a reasonable amount of realism, and creating a world where terrain makes sense is actually quite difficult. What, then, if I used the real terrain of our world? From there, I also wanted to run a fantasy setting, and that led to using some long-standing ideas I've had about magic, psionics, and deities. One thing I didn't tell the players in my first campaign was that they were adventuring near or in their own hometown; I managed to make that a surprise reveal about two-thirds of the way in.

SS: Looks like *Children of the Apocalypse* is for the Savage Worlds RPG system. What do you enjoy about this system? Do you have experience with other RPG systems (D&D™, Pathfinder, etc)?



SD: I've played a LOT of different systems - D&D originally, some Pathfinder, the World of Darkness games, old-school Traveller, Gamma World, Call of Cthulhu, and probably several others I'm not mentioning. I settled on Savage Worlds for Happy Monster because, as a GM with a day job and a family, I've found it one of the easiest games to prepare and run. Also, Pinnacle's licensing scheme for Savage Worlds is really great, and the community of licensees is very supportive of new publishers.

SS: One of the other products listed on your site was "The Tower of Fogaren" which looks like a supplement for Children of the Apocalypse. Can you tell me a little about it?

SD: "The Tower of Fogaren" is the first of three one-shot supplementary adventures for Children of the Apocalypse. One thing I've admired about other publishers is their support for settings beyond the core book. I'm working to keep a flow of Children of the Apocalypse material available to help inspire GMs in their own adventures. "The Tower of Fogaren" is an infiltration mission into the tower of a powerful wizard who has gone missing; the goal is to discover what happened and why the tower's magical defenses are active. The other two adventures so far are "The Hostage Prince", a rescue mission, and "The Disks of Chaos", which involves a magical DVD changer.

SS: Any exciting things on the horizon for Happy Monster Press?

SD: I'm very excited about the next setting book planned from Happy Monster, Legion of Liberty. The short description of the setting is the American Revolutionary War - with superheroes. I'm about 80% through playtesting the campaign, and I'll likely be Kickstarting it in early 2019. I've been publishing a record of the playtest campaign on my Monster Blog, so if the setting sounds interesting, you can read more about it there.

SS: Is there anything else that you'd like to share that I didn't ask about?

SD: The one other thing I'd like to share are some of my fan adaptations. You'll find these on the blog as well; from time to time, I take an existing IP that doesn't have a RPG setting and, as we say in the Savage Worlds community, "I Savage it." Right now, I have a "Savageged" Eclipse Phase, which is a posthuman science fiction setting (think Altered Carbon), and I'll shortly be publishing some adaptations for playing in Naomi Novik's Temeraire books (Napoleonic Wars with dragons).

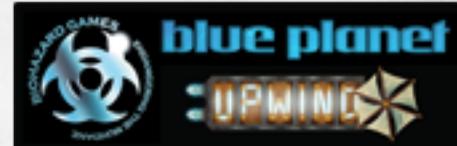
SS: I have to ask, in your "About" you mention that your gaming career started when you were the only survivor of your party's first encounter in the Red Box Dungeons & Dragons because you had bought a mount. How did the mount save you?

SD: In my very first game of D&D, I played a magic-user (still one of my favorite classes). First level magic users don't actually need a lot of gear, and I rolled well for gold, so I figured I'd buy a horse. My party encountered a force of goblins, and we lost really, really badly. After the fighters, the cleric and the thief went down, and I'd used my one magic missile spell, I ran for it - and my horse could outrun the goblins. This was a VERY short campaign.

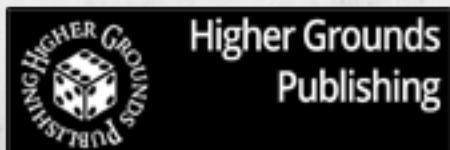
Interview by Scott Sanazaro who runs and manages The Goblin Gazette.

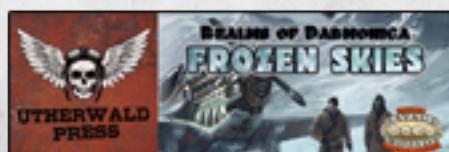
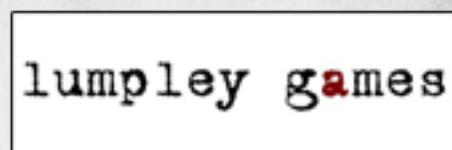


VENDORS HALL



D101 GAMES





ESSAY

SYMPATHY FOR THE ANTI-HERO BY M.J. HOLMES

In the course of my writing, one of the unique twists on the plot of a story is a character who has no desire to be part of the story.

They were thrust into the fray, commanding a presence they didn't think they wanted, but only for it suited their eventual nefarious or self-minded need.

We tend to think of a character with the least desire to complete great heroism still going along with the adventure whilst acting under their own volition an anti-hero. We know of several: Shakespeare's Macbeth, Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlowe (or practically any other Private Detective), and even Terry Pratchett's Rincewind.

When I wrote my first book, I took the characters and examined what I was doing with them. Where did they come from, what were they capable of, and were they willing to do what it took to finish their quest? I also asked if I could consider them Anti-Heroes. Kind...of...ish. Yeah, they were pulled from their individual worlds à la a "The Drawing of The Three" kind of moments. They didn't know what or why until someone came along and gave them a bunch of cryptic nonsense to decipher as they went that would result in their Ultimate Win. Even then, did they want to deal with that? Well, they agreed, but reluctantly.

Their viewpoints were from several ages, levels of technological awareness, and realistic awareness that did nothing for them when some fur-clad bugger on a giant eagle turned up. No matter how much money he flashed for them to do the job. Yet, the writing has entered its third book, they've already achieved heroic feats, but they still haven't decided if their entitlements mean anything more than squat. Especially when facing the issue they're not even in the same world anymore, let alone the same dimension to enjoy the benefit. Most especially the one who just wanted to go home from the start.

We have our own favorite Anti-Heroes. We delight in their ways and how their interplay with other characters aids them in ultimately realizing their means. However, what of an Anti-Hero in gaming? Surely there must be someone out there who can attest to creating whichever character for whatever system, hating it instantly after the first few rolls, but carrying on with the idea that the death will probably be quick and rolling up a new character much easier...

Then they find their Lawful Evil Bard is high enough a level and skill to sing lullabies in orcish while the Thief taints the Orc draught supply culminating in putting the entire local horde to a deep sleep. All so the party Paladin can have a night out playing Whack-An-Orc and enjoying every coup de grâce they don't need lucky rolls to make.

Then the Milestone Award rolls in and - well then, all that prep and netting a pleasant gain - might stick it out a bit longer with this PC, huh?

The approach to utilizing Anti-Heroes in gaming could be to anyone's suit or taste. Personally, I'd like to think it's taking a handicap and seeing just how far that little challenge gives us the enjoyment of the scenario. Especially when the whims of the GM/DM dictate party alignment restrictions or dole out pre-rolled PCs that hinder a Player's creative flow.

That LE Bard and LG Paladin combo I mentioned earlier? Yes, I'd allow it at my table just to see how the PCs carried on (Hells, I let someone play a Kender once...). They only know of each other as 'Bard of Whatever Town They Felt Necessary To Say They Hail From' and 'Paladin of Somesuch Holy Yahoo'. Why not let the actions play out and see who starts wising up first? The Bard Anti-Hero gets to have all the fun skunking the Paladin with distractions whilst carrying on meeting their own goals as the Paladin happily caves in another Orc Mage skull in the name of their Holy Yahoo. Especially since the Bard owed quite a large sum of money to one of the stronger Tribe warriors after a number of poor wagers.

It works. It makes sense.



Alignments are met; keeping in mind an LE Bard probably frequents the shadier taverns allowing even shadier Orc warriors to lift pints together out of the comfort of fewer Constables or other Lawkeepers. The ruse is upheld seeing as how the Bard can simply relate they found out about the secret Orc Camp whilst earning some road money at one of the local taverns, and not about how they raised pints and made wagers in places that frequent Orcs. The plot is furthered even if not for the GM's original design, but for the fun overall. All the GM cared about was that the party got to the camp and walloped Orcs so that their prisoners could be saved. The Paladin got to cleanse evil, evil Orcs from the world and the Bard can take comfort a dead Orc Warrior can't collect his bets.

What of other settings though? Fantasy is wonderful and all, but what of Science Fiction and Shadowrunners collecting a well-earned marker versus going back to prison? The Wild West and gunfighters robbing the banks that foreclosed on everyone's property, not just theirs? Airborne dogfighting versus a possible foe with similar goals as yours, but there can't be two of you owning the skies? Or even Present Day? As gamers, we delight in a multitude of possibilities to choose from. Where do the Anti-Heroes fit if not as the Big Bad at the End of the Game?

As a writer of fiction, I needed a viewpoint that would sum up what good Anti-Heroes were. I asked around what other gamers considered their favorites. The answers were great; enlightening even, but not quite enough. All the Anti-Heroes chosen had a place to drive the story already. They were the story. Even my own, Hudson Hawk. Too easy to think about how they wanted a simple goal, but someone or something steps in and says, "Nope. You're going to do this thing instead. Maybe in your own way, but you're going to finish it and like it."

Makes for neat stories, but what of gameplay? The finer interplay of characters is lacking now. Where's the sudden realization the Anti-Hero has skunked the entire party this entire time and has only now revealed their true intentions at the cusp of dropping the BBEG to its knees? To take a powder, or to take the treasure, or to take over the kingdom?

That is up to the Gamer. The one who hides in the shadows of their intentions behind poker faces and carefully-passed paranoia notes. The one who uses the GM's hatred for Meta-Gaming (well, mine at least) to push their agenda without the other Players becoming able to check-roll for the truth.

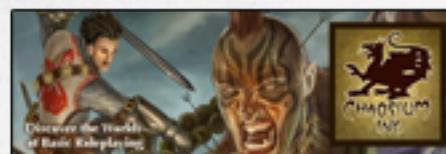
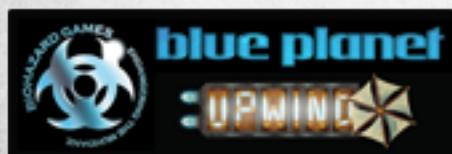
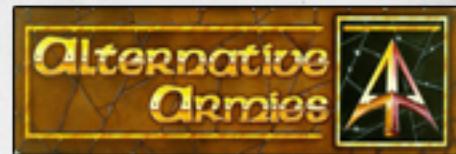
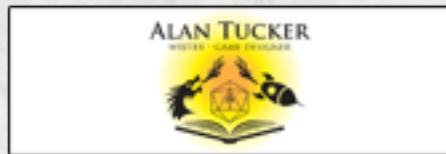
The ones who not only play but act the Anti-Hero. The ones who delight in being the character, even for a few moments in their lives because they got a taste for it. Or, at least, got dragged into playing one and liked it. They found the rewards for being the Character outweighed the In-Game dangers.

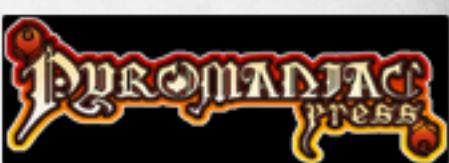
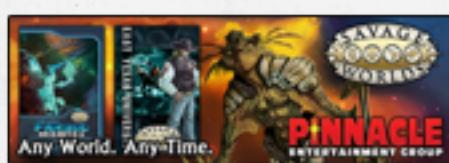
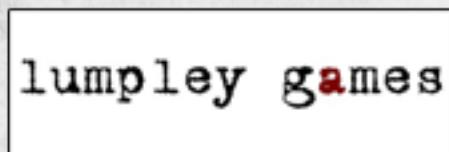
Play the Role. Be the Anti-Hero. See where it gets you.

There's always the safe comfort otherwise of rolling up another Orc-hating Paladin of the Church of Some Latter-Day Holy Yahoo...



PRIZE HALL





Q&A: RAL PARTHA EUROPE

PETER BRYANT
INTERVIEWS
PAUL REID

Peter Bryant: How did you get started in the miniatures industry?

Paul Reid: I got into miniatures while I was at school, probably the same way a lot of gamers my age were drawn into the hobby in the late eighties, via Games Workshop's Heroquest game. I'd bought a few White Dwarf magazines and was instantly hooked, Heroquest went on my Christmas list and I drafted my family into regular gaming sessions. Then Space Hulk came out and I started buying metal miniatures to add into the games. I started working for a local games company that distributed Target Games' Warzone range, they began to import Ral Partha too and when the time came to set up a European Ral Partha company I was drafted in to cast and make moulds.

PB: Who is your biggest influence and what work of theirs inspires you?

PR: I'm an amateur artist and painter (at best!) but the same influences that inspire my amateur dabblings also inspire the miniatures we commission for production. There are the classic miniatures of Ral Partha and Citadel and their sculptors such as Tom Meier, Sandra Garrity, Julie Guthrie, Jes Goodwin, the Perrys, Bob Olley and many more. I couldn't possibly pick out a single influence but alongside all those sculpting legends I'd mention Dune (the book and film), Lovecraft, eighties goth music, 2000AD comics, Blue Oyster Cult, Brian Froud, LOTR -I'll stop there or it will be a very long list and we'll get into some pretty weird territory (I'm a big fan of 'Oliver!' the musical)

PB: What is your favorite experience while working for the company?

PR: I've been at Ral Partha Europe since it was set up in 2000, I think my favourite experience is one that was also a bit of a gamble at the time- buying the Demonworld range of 15mm fantasy miniatures. I knew they were great miniatures, they had been out of production for a while and I hoped that there would still be interest in them, especially the way we planned to sell them- in the original army packs as well as smaller skirmish packs and single figures. It all worked out well, I've even added some of my own sculpts to the range.

PB: What do you think is the reason for Ral Partha's success since 1975?

PR: I probably need to clarify here that we are a totally separate entity to the original Ral Partha, we were set up in 2000 by FASA Games to supply Battletech primarily, but also some of the more recent Partha fantasy releases. The original Ral Partha ranges are now in the capable hands of Iron Wind Metals in the US. We do get regular inquiries from people after the older ranges, even with the plethora of different ranges available these days so I would say that Ral Partha has built its reputation on the quality of design, sculpting and casting over many years.

PB: What is your favorite Ral Partha figure and what draws you to it?

PR: This is a tough one, from the old days of Ral Partha I'd have to choose one of the miniatures that made it over here to the UK, via Games Workshop, probably the 'Zombie Dragon', though I have a soft spot for the 'Jabberwock'. Of our own Ral Partha Europe miniatures I'd probably go with our 'Dwarf Brewmaster', it was a key miniature in our most successful Kickstarter to date and is just an excellent characterful mini.

PB: What is Ral Partha's best-selling figure line today and how has that changed?

RPE Miniatures & Games

www.ralparthaeurope.co.uk

PR: Battletech, we still produce most of the range under license and it's still a big seller. There have been a lot of changes over the years, figures that have come and gone, ownership that has changed hands, legal issues, you could probably write a book about the history of Battletech miniatures but we are only a small part of it. Our best-selling line that is entirely ours is Demonworld, the 15mm fantasy range. Most of the range was sculpted by the great Werner Klocke and in my opinion, has never been bettered.

PB: Has Kickstarter affected how you do business?

PR: It hasn't changed our business that much, it's just provided us with another method of selling miniatures and it seems another market, we reach a lot of people on Kickstarter that we wouldn't otherwise through our website and the stores we supply. It has helped us to increase our rate of new releases though and it allows us to get new ranges off to a flying start.

PB: Is Ral Partha's process of sculpting models completely traditional or do you use any 3D modeling/printing?

PR: We are dabbling in 3D design at the moment but primarily we are still traditional, our sculptors use polymer clay or epoxy putty to produce the master sculpts.

PB: Can you briefly describe what spin casting is that Ral Partha uses?

PR: We produce a two part disc mould in either organic or silicone rubber using our master castings. Gates are cut into the mould to allow the metal to flow into the figure cavities and small vents are cut from the cavities to allow air to escape. The disc is put into a casting machine that uses air pressure to clamp the disc between two plates, then it begins to spin the mould. We pour the metal in through a central hole and the centrifugal force pushes the metal out into the cavities. We let it spin for a minute or so, the bigger the piece the longer it needs to cool and harden, before removing the mould and breaking the castings off the central sprue.

PB: Do you think there's any reason to be concerned with the recent advancements in 3D printing?

PR: At the moment, no. I think we are still a way off from having affordable machines for home use that will provide miniatures of the quality you can buy in metal or resin.

PB: Do you feel there's a need for Ral Partha to prepare for the day when everyone has 3D printers in their homes?

PR: The only way we can prepare for that is to continue to offer the best miniatures we can for an affordable price. Maybe one day we will be selling files for people to print at home but I think there are going to be big issues with piracy when that happens. I hope that people will always want to buy quality metal miniatures, they are still selling vinyl records so I can continue to live in hope.

PB: Do you prefer metal or plastic and why?

PR: Metal all the way! Some of it is probably nostalgia, but I just prefer the feel and weight of a metal miniature. Although I admit that can wear a bit then when transporting an army around!

PB: Is there any new genre that you'd like to see Ral Partha get into?

PR: We are planning a new range that should make it onto Kickstarter next year, think cold weather exploration in the 19th century, eccentric characters, and dangerous wildlife and possibly even a pinch of eldritch horror...

Interview by Peter Bryant at Multiverse!



Q&A: TRI TAC GAMES

ANDREW GIRDWOOD
INTERVIEWS
MELODY NATCHER

Andrew Girdwood: Could you introduce Tri Tac Games?

Melody Natcher: Tri Tac Games had its beginnings in 1978 when Role Playing was a boxed set of TSR™ books and hard-to-get polyhedral dice. First called "Tacky Tack Games", the company produced the classic Microgame, Geriatric Wars. Within three years Rich Tucholka had created Fringeworthy, the first RPG of inter-dimensional travel, and was at work on Bureau 13, and a space game called FTL: 2448. The company name was changed to reflect the more serious products.

In the years before Richard's passing from cancer early in 2017, an effort was begun to revise and modernize classic Tri Tac and expand Tri Tac's range of products. With Richard's health and stamina in decline, his partner, Mel Natcher (aka Wasahbe Greene), took the helm as General Manager of Tri Tac, aided by Sally Vilkman, their Communications Officer.

AG: Could you tell us about the FBI raid?

MN: Yes, the raid happened. No kidding. In Richard's own words....

"Apparently some fool at GENCON 1994 thought double-sized Plastic ID badges on flaming orange and bright pink paper were a threat to national security. These badges were given to players of Bureau 13 as promotional material. Here's the true story.

"At 10 a.m. Tuesday morning, August 23rd, 1994, a special tactical team from the FBI gained swift and overwhelming entry into the corporate offices of Tri Tac Games in Pontiac, Michigan, to the great surprise of the entire staff which was still sipping coffee.

"Rich Tucholka, owner and president of Tri Tac, was duly informed of his rights as the squad of federal agents neatly and politely searched the offices of Tri Tac, claiming to be looking for "phony FBI identification badges" and "illicit government operation manuals".

"Tri Tac Games publishes an award-winning Role-Playing Game called Bureau 13, detailing the adventures of a secret government agency which uses magic and Harrier Jump Jets to defend America from supernatural criminals and monsters.

"After painstakingly searching everything, from the yet-to-be-released CD-ROM computer game version of Bureau 13, through the paperback copies of the cult-hit novels from Ace Books in New York, absolutely nothing incriminating or illegal was discovered: an incident close to the precedent-setting invasion of Steve Jackson Games™ a few years ago by the US Secret Service which resulted in a major lawsuit, rightfully won by the innocent game company."

AG: Many people fondly remember Richard Tucholka and Tri Tac Games is his legacy. Was it a hard decision to keep the company going?

MN: What Richard wanted more than anything else was for Tri Tac to live on. Those of us who loved him are doing our best to ensure the survival of his legacy. It was not a difficult decision at all, and - so far - has proven worth every moment of our commitment.

AG: Is there renewed interest in space RPGs or nostalgia for wondering about a space travelling future?

MN: Richard was always a bellwether - a man ahead of the curve. We are seeing a resurgence in interest in sci-fi and space adventuring in popular



culture in general; from Cyberpunk 2077 to the reboot of Lost in Space. The difference is that EZ Space is EASY space travel, the sci-fi equivalent of spelljamming, where 1950's B-movie science rules and things just work! So, nostalgia is part of EZ Space's popularity, combined with technology fatigue and an unquenched longing for the stars.

AG: What about Bureau 13 appeals so strongly to role-players?

MN: My personal favorite has always been Fringeworthy. I asked Sally Vilkman, our diehard Bureau 13 fan and she said...

"Bureau 13 agents are ordinary people that had an encounter with something out of the ordinary, be it aliens, supernatural or even mythical. They get recruited to join people that believe the encounter happened to help solve other encounters that occur all over the area. It is regular people with day jobs that solve mysteries, stop disasters and mediate with aliens, then go home and act like it was just another day at the office."

Bureau 13's original title was "Stalking the Night Fantastic". Richard's sense of wonder, quirky humor, and dedication to player buy-in permeate every aspect of B-13's settings and setups. Players can pick from all of modern life when they put on their character masks -- rather than chafing within the constraints of a few set backgrounds and character paths. They get to fight Evil and can be as serious or silly as their character concepts call for.

AG: You publish Beach Bunny Bimbos with Blasters as a tongue-in-cheek action in which humanity fights body-snatching aliens. Are gamers today as interested in that style of game as they were when BBBwB was first published?

MN: Actually, a Tri Tac fan site recently pitched an updated version of BBBwB with the working title "California Beachhead," complete with dudes and dudettes. While BBBwB started as Richard's irreverent response to being cast as an NPC in Greg Porter's "Macho Women with Guns", and while the game premise is definitely a child of the same transitional social consciousness that gave rise to other tongue-in-cheek empowerment arcs such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, it still has a dedicated fan base. Remember, the Bimbos are the heroes - they rise to the occasion and are there to kick names and take ass.

AG: RPG publishers have raised more than \$1,000,000 on Kickstarter. Do you think it's good for the industry?

MN: I've contributed to Kickstarters, and they are good for the industry. As the gaming industry grew, it also contracted with small presses and independents losing ground to the big guns. Crowdsourced funding gives players a bigger voice on what is worth making not just what is worth ponying up for once it is in the stores.

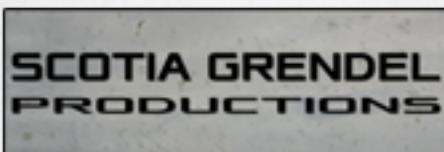
AG: What can we expect from Tri Tac Games?

MN: Various revised and re-released classics, and new scenarios and quirky expansions for current works. But what I am working on is the second edition of Hardwired Hinterland; new art, new scenarios, new settings, completely reorganized, indexed and expanded. Hardwired Hinterland was the first thing I worked on with Richard - you can see my art all the way through the 1st Edition. When HH came up for revision, I decided to make it the proof of concept for where we want the company to go. So far, Sally Vilkman, John Reiher and John Natcher have joined in expanding HH. And Richard's old friends, artist/consultants Robin Wood and William Wardrop have pitched in their talent and knowledge of InDesign and aviation.

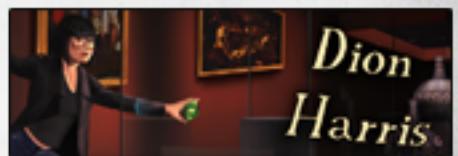
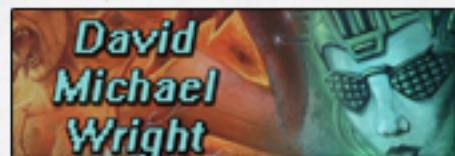
Interview by Andrew Girdwood who run Geek Native!



ANVIL ALLEY



ARTIST ENCLAVE



Q&A: FASA

ANDREW GIRDWOOD
INTERVIEWS
ANDREW RAGLAND

Andrew Girdwood: Can you tell us a bit about FASA Games, which games you look after, and your demographic?

Andrew Ragland: FASA Games Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of FASA Inc., the original company, and serves as FASA's development and production arm. We produce Earthdawn 4E, high fantasy post-apocalyptic horror where civilization is trying to rebuild after a great magical catastrophe; 1879, steampunk fantasy where a technologically advanced late Victorian age is dealing with the abrupt return of magic and a stable wormhole to another world; Demonworld, a high fantasy survival horror miniatures combat game with an RPG in development; and Noble Armada, starship miniatures combat in the Fading Suns universe, where starships are rare and precious technology and the emphasis is on capture rather than destruction. People who like 18mm minis with straightforward, rapid-play rules, and people who like character and story-driven roleplaying in complex and deep gameworlds, generally enjoy our games.

AG: What's the state of play with Earthdawn?

AR: Elven Nations, the final book in the Kickstarter, is in editorial. Once it's printed, we'll do a final round of shipment together with the remaining Travar, Questors, and Earthdawn 4E Companion books owed, the embroidered shirts, and close out the Kickstarter. This will include all non-USA customers, who have been terrifically patient while we got our shipping through Liverpool sorted out to hold down costs. Next up, Josh Harrison [Line Developer] is talking about Lopos, a city-state that has been a Big Bad for a long time but never got its own book. He's got some announcements planned for the near future, so I don't want to steal his thunder, but at GenCon he also talked about further development of Barsaive and deeper exploration of the surrounding lands like Rugaria and Vasgothia.

AG: What is it about the Earthdawn 4th edition Kickstarter that commands such a strong following - raising \$101,000 from over a thousand backers?

AR: Earthdawn takes the tropes common to sword and sorcery gaming, and puts them into context within the game world. It plays to the power of legend: the more people who believe your character is a great hero, the more of a great hero that character becomes. The Horrors are not just pop-up targets. They're devious, nasty opponents that make long-term plans, and don't show their cards until they have to. Each of the races has serious depth to their culture with traditions and customs and language described to give the players plenty of roleplaying source material. Earthdawn has also advanced its game world and metaplot over the years, with major events reshaping the game world that the players have been able to influence and play through. I've personally run a campaign of Earthdawn for over 25 years that now has its own wiki to keep track of the literally hundreds of NPCs that have been encountered, and all the player characters who have come and gone over the campaign's history.

AG: Could you introduce us to 1879 and share the progress of the Players and GM's Companions?

AR: In an alternate timeline, where Prince Albert survives the coach crash and subsequent illnesses, the Analytical Engine has been constructed, and the Ottoman Empire is not the Sick Man of Europe, a Weird Scientist performs an experiment that goes disastrously wrong. This event creates a stable wormhole in Greenwich Park leading to another world and brings about the return of magic 140 years before it should have



happened. Within a month, the Boojum races (elf, dwarf, snark, and troll) have sprung from within humanity as “Looking Glass Fever” changes people. Priests find their prayers have real power and a dangerous cult seizes the opportunity, nearly sacrificing London to dark powers. A year later, as the new world is being colonized, the British have run headlong into the Saurids and the Samsut and the Prussians have their first off-world settlement. Mages do quality control work in the factories. Byrons hack into the Engines of the great firms for nefarious purposes. Dodgers skulk in the shadows between the firms, doing things that need plausible deniability. Playable as steampunk noir, pulp adventure, military campaigning, or exploration of a new world, 1879 provides considerable opportunity for players to build their own stories.

The forthcoming 1879 Player’s and GM’s Companions will contribute heavily to that, as both books will contain tools for expanding the game world. The Player’s has the mechanics for building new Professions, new Base Spells and KAVs, and new magical Lodges. The GM’s Companion shows how to create new creatures for the Bestiary, as well as providing the vehicular combat system. Right now, the Player’s Companion is about 2/3 done, the GM’s about 1/4 done. We’re making good progress, and being transparent about it on our social media.

AG: What’s the relationship between FASA Games and Ral Partha Europe?

AR: FASA Games Inc. and Ral Partha Europe are both wholly owned subsidiaries of FASA Inc. Ral Partha creates and produces minis for FASA, while FASA Games creates and produces books. The two work hand in hand as departments of the same corporation.

AG: I mentioned your miniature space fleet game Noble Armada; what about the Fading Suns author Todd Bogenrief? Is he back at FASA working on Noble Armada (which uses the Fading Suns setting)?

AR: Correct, Todd has rejoined FASA to bring out the Noble Armada House books. House Decados is currently in layout, with more on the way. Todd will be making his own announcements of the order and schedule, and I don’t want to step on his lines, so watch our social media!

AG: Is there any news for Demonworld fans? What are the next few Army books that you are working on and how is the Demonworld RPG going?

AR: Next up is the Isthak, with the Entomids somewhere after that. We don’t have a hard and fast schedule on this right now, but the Isthak book is in layout. Once preliminary layout is done, we will Kickstart the book for art and printing costs, which has become our standard model. Backers get immediate access to the pre-art layout, as proof the book already exists, and we only have a couple of steps remaining before the book gets sent to the printer. We can keep our fulfillment time down and get the books out to the backers sooner rather than later. The Demonworld RPG has been pulled back from the schedule for redevelopment. We’re focusing on the survival horror element, on what makes Demonworld different from other high fantasy game systems out there, and revising the mechanics to bring them into better alignment with what’s currently being done with Earthdawn 4E and 1879. There’s no schedule on this - better to give ourselves time to do it right and then announce it when it’s ready to Kickstart than to set a deadline and have to rush through the work to meet it.

AG: If I want to keep up to date with FASA news where should I look? Do you have a Discord server or similar where I can go chat with other people about your games?

AR:
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fasagamesinc> Google+: <https://plus.google.com/+Fasagames> Twitter: @fasagames
Discord: <https://discord.gg/fkc6ZdX> FASA Games official forum: <http://www.fasagames.com/forum>
And of course our primary website at <http://www.fasagames.com>!

Interview by Andrew Girdwood who runs Geek Native!



Q&A: SHADES OF VENGEANCE

KAITLIN DAVIES
INTERVIEWS
ED JOWETT

Kaitlin Davies: Era: Consortium was the first game published by your company Shades of Vengeance, and since then it has expanded to even include the likes of comic books and music specifically created for the universe! It really feels like a labor of love from across a wide variety of creators. How did the universe of Era: Consortium come to life and what does this universe mean to you and Shades of Vengeance?

Ed Jowett: When I started creating... there was never really any intention of publishing books.

What that meant, though, is that I created the game I would want to play. I built the kind of science fiction that interests me as a lifelong fan of the genre - one where I can play any sub-genre of Sci-Fi, depending on how I want to theme my game, without having to change rules all the time to accommodate that.

So yes, I agree! Era: The Consortium is a labour of love for me. I haven't finished with that universe - I honestly think it may be the case that I never do entirely.

Comics in the universe happened because of a remarkable individual who I met during the process, Johnathan Lewis. As someone with years and years of professional experience in writing comics, I was only too pleased to work with him to follow his passion in my new universe. Comics allow you to tell stories from a different perspective to what makes sense in a role-roleplaying game: they can suck you into a specific moment much better, I find, and the Era: The Consortium universe is very much made up of moments which are ripe for that.

I think that, to us, Era: The Consortium proved it can be done - an indie company with no history of publishing can make an amazing RPG, capable of bringing fun to thousands of people. When we saw that people were interested not only in the game but also in the universe described within, we felt like opportunities were all over the place to do whatever we wanted inside it. That meant comics, audio, RPG campaigns with a huge range of themes, miniatures, with plans for much more!

Era: The Consortium has only grown since the day it launched almost five years ago, both in opportunities and in audience. I hope it will continue to do so for many years to come!

KD: What is it about Era D10 dice mechanic system you created that separates it from other mechanics on the market?

EJ: I think that the system provides a balance, rather than trying to be entirely story-driven or mechanics driven: The mechanics support storytelling and genre but they are also enhanced by it.

I like the fact that it offers the opportunity to narrate your own combat style, for example, without being sternly informed by the rules that a flying kick is the strongest brawl attack that could ever be used.

I also think the level of ease with which a player can understand the rules - even people who have never played a tabletop RPG before - combined with the complexity of mastering them is an interesting challenge for the more statistically-minded. I play regularly with mathematicians, physicists, and programmers but they have not yet found an "ideal build", thanks to the flexibility of the system. Notably, for GMs,

it also contains tools to counter min-maxing if you want them (or to promote it, if that is how you choose to run the game!).

In short, the Era d10 Rule Set is a toolkit which enables a large number of genres and even combina-





publishing, I recommend reading that when it comes out! You can find out more here: <https://rpgs4all.blogspot.com/p/role-playing-relief.html>

The biggest challenges are, I think, related to what I like to call the “Project Paradigm”. I can quite literally talk for an hour on the subject, so I will spare you that, but here is the summary:

Have a statement of what you want your project to achieve. Keep it in your creative space and with everything you do, ask yourself whether you are heading in that direction.

Working with this will help you immensely: if the project gets boring, then adjust that, if you find someone has done something similar, you can identify differences easily... and so on.

KD: As we have seen with other Era games, Era: The Chosen, also allows players to jump into different time periods within the universe and have the story, equipment, and character choices change depending on WHEN their adventure takes place. Why did you choose to create different time periods for your games and what about it do you think appeals to players?

EJ: This was my answer to a question I have been asking for years, which started with Era: The Consortium. I always wondered why I had to buy 5 different games to play Star Trek™ (Exploration), Star Wars™ (Rebellion), Farscape™ (“Lost in Space”), Steamship Troopers (All-out War) and Cyberpunk-style games. I know you don’t, technically, of course, but you are into homebrewing rules and technology to make it work.

I decided to create a game which offered an expansive history and every sub-genre of Sci-Fi I could think of. Era: The Empowered, and to a lesser extent Era: The Chosen, are the same: I wanted to offer every sub-genre that made sense.

I think this offers some cool opportunities, the “Time Travel Campaign” I have been building on our Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/SoV>) for over 4 years is a great example - it is a chance to play through a huge number of different sub-genre with an ongoing plot which spans the whole lot!

KD: What are some of the other projects that you have on the go at the moment? What are you most excited for?

EJ: I have a few things going on right now! The first is the Era: Survival - Colony Kickstarter, which will be happening during November. I actually finished developing this game a few months ago and it has been patiently waiting its turn on Kickstarter!

It is inspired by games such as Dead of Winter but requires only the deck to play, so it is very portable. In it, you enter “Gaia” and try to defend your colony from the various threats - Infected (zombies) are just one of them: people can die from blight or drought, other human factions can affect your colonists and more. The goal? Survive.

It is a co-operative game for 1-4 players, but I plan to offer a “Betrayal” Expansion deck as a Stretch Goal which would add the chance for a traitor within the colony. I am also working on a few other Roleplaying Games, such as Era: Lost Legend and “Era: High Fantasy” (Working Title), plus miniatures for Era: The Consortium and ongoing support and expansion for our various games.

tions of genres through a modular set of rules which can be transferred between all of our games, but all follow the same paradigm.

KD: What are some of the biggest struggles you see game creators facing when trying to put RPGs together?

EJ: I wrote an extensive article on the subject in the “Role-playing Relief” book, which is yet to be released, and if you are interested in my thoughts on

here: <https://rpgs4all.blogspot.com/p/role-playing-relief.html>

Interview by Kaitlin Davies who is part of The Dice Pool Podcast!



“I look at you, Commander, and I see not a man, but a galaxy of subatomic particles I can pull apart and rearrange with a casual thought. This is a power we were never meant to have. We’re not ready for it.”

– Jason Ironheart, Babylon 5

“Also, I can kill you with my brain.” – River Tam, Firefly

Ah, psionics. It's an old standby of science fiction. Whether cataloged and analyzed as a scientific phenomenon, such as the psychic powers of Babylon 5 or considered a mystical energy force subject to spiritual exploration, as with the Force in Star Wars, psionics pervades science fiction works from across the subgenres. But why does this trope remerge so often in science fiction works? What is its purpose, both narratively and from a gamist perspective? And why, when it is combined into fantasy settings, is there such a mixed reaction? Let us take a dive into our narrative unconscious mind and find out.

Welcome to Psionics 101

What is psionics anyways? Referring to a variety of mental powers, from telepathic mind manipulation to the physical manifestations of telekinesis, the term originated in the so-called “psi-boom” of the 1940s and 50s. While specifically referred to as such in some works, including the fantasy roleplaying game Dungeons and Dragons, psionics come by many other names.

Common terms include psychic powers, extrasensory perception (ESP), and variations such as Psyker (Warhammer 40k psychic), but individual intellectual properties often include these powers under a more setting appropriate name. Two examples of the latter, Mobile Suit Gundam's Newtypes and Mass Effect's biotics, seek to position their psionics as more plausible by couching them in speculative science terms. This aligns with their harder science fiction genre. “The Force” of Star Wars is the mirror opposite, couched in mysticism befitting the work's status as not a work of hard science fiction, but an epic of space fantasy. Although their names may differ, the function of the trope remains roughly the same across each work. This allows an effective comparison to be made across works. Armed with these fundamentals, it's time to dig deeper into detail.

Index Psykana: Standard Issue Powers

Knowing that psionics can come by many names, yet are often the same thing under the hood, let's take a moment to explore what type of abilities are generally grouped under that umbrella term. Somehow, I bet if you are reading them, you already know most of them. As an exercise to the reader, try and come up with your own list before reading mine.

So what types of powers are we talking about? The sometimes-flippant, yet imminently useful, reference site Tvtropes.org provides a handy breakdown. The gestalt consciousness of Tvtropes provides six major categories: clairvoyance and clairaudience (sensing what cannot normally be sensed), retrocognition and precognition (seeing the past and the future), empathy (sensing and healing emotions), telepathy (mind reading and mind alteration), telekinesis (moving physical objects with the mind), and mediumship (seeing, communicating with, or channeling spirits). A special mention goes out to teleportation, which often is excluded from the more common six. When it's in, it tends to be rare and powerful.

These categories are quite broad, and each represents a long list of potential powers and abilities. Telepathy might include reading buried or guarded memories, while telekinetic control of fire or ice is common under the terms pyrokinesis and cryokinesis. The possible applications of these six (plus one) categories are far too numerous to list here, but each ability largely fits nicely into one of these overarching disciplines.

A quick glance over this list of categories may induce a little *déjà vu*. Where have we seen these before? In a variety of speculative fiction works that include psionic powers, yes. But where else? Why magic, of course.



Psionics: The Other Magic

So, we've got characters with special abilities. Abilities that allow for amazing feats like seeing miles away (scrying?), altering other people's minds (charm person? bestow curse?), even seemingly create fire and ice out of nowhere (fireball? ice storm?). Clearly, this sounds a lot like magic. So, what's the difference?

Arthur C. Clarke's famous third law of science fiction applies here. According to Clarke's third law, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Let's read technology as broadly, "the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes." I think we can all agree that telekinesis, as an example, has many practical applications, from advanced combat techniques to simple laziness. So, one answer presents itself: aside from set dressing, there is no difference.

Psionics, like magic, allows for characters to wield significant personal power. This allows characters significant agency, allows storytellers to dramatically up the stakes, and just makes for an all-around fantastic series of tales. There is certainly a literary debate on whether magic should be governed by consistent rules in a set system, perhaps abiding by Brandon Sanderson's laws of magic, or if those very rules remove the awe and mystery from magic. There are certainly merits to both arguments, but when it comes to most roleplaying games the choice is already made for us. In anything but the most rules light systems, magic and psionics have defined rules for the players to follow.

Now, if magic and psionics are fundamentally the same things to a roleplaying game, in that fantastic powers governed by a ruleset, even if by different mechanics within the same game system, what distinction remains to discuss? I called it set dressing before, the lore explanation and justification for the powers. Distinguishing between magic and psionics can make the critical difference between including a magic/psionic system at all, or having it be rejected as not fitting the setting.

I alluded to the subgenres of science fiction earlier. A reportage of these subgenres and their place on the sliding scale of sci-fi realism could easily be the subject of several essays. Intuitively, though, I think we get it. The importance of realism, and the willingness to suspend disbelief, is going to vary between something like Andy Weir's *The Martian* and Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Players, like readers of these books, come to the table with certain assumptions about how realistic a game ought to be, including its coverage of magic or psionics. In the former, an ultra-hard science survival thriller, magic or psionics would be completely out of place. In the latter, an awesomely bizarre series in which technology runs on rule of funny, it would be entirely reasonable to say, "Oh yeah, those guys totally have magic. Just letting you know." Most settings will be somewhere in between.

So why, generally, do we see psionics more so than magic in works of science fiction? One answer may be the "psi-boom" of the 1940s, mentioned previously, or perhaps the popularity of psychic prophets and secret CIA remote viewing experiments towards the end of the previous century. More simply, psionics may be more plausible on average than magic as a scientifically observable phenomenon. While no study, as of the time of writing, has indicated there is any truth to psychic claims, that could potentially change because of some of the speculative scientific development. My earliest examples, *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Mass Effect*, both include a form of psionics resulting from exposure to newly discovered particles or substances. The counterexample, *Star Wars*, proves the rule: consider fan outrage when the mystical Force was explained by the science of midichlorians. Storyteller, know thy audience.

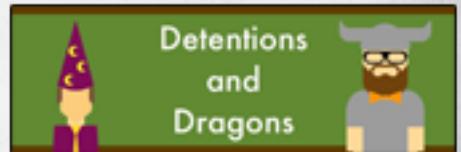
You Got Psionics In My Magic!

So, if that explains why we see magic, psionics, or nothing as the three options, we have one question remaining. Why not both? Well, it is certainly possible. *Dungeons and Dragons* certainly has rules for both. But with arcane and divine magic, preparation and intuitive casters, ki energy, and psionics all existing within the same setting, there are many who feel the magic has been diluted. One could argue from a gamist perspective that this is the result of too many different rulesets and mechanics, that since all the game effects are similar then the rules must be brought in line. That's certainly a debate worth having, but I'll leave that to someone more qualified. For me, it's all back to setting.

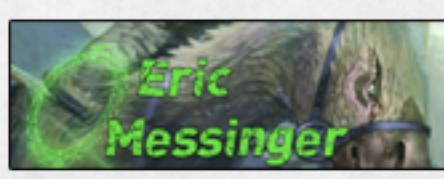
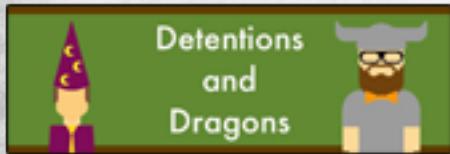
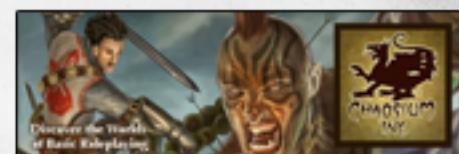
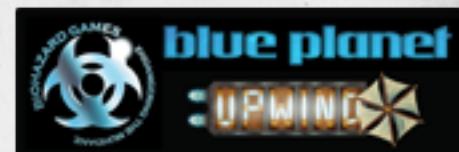
In your bog-standard *Dungeons and Dragons*, there are some clear rules in a universe for what exactly magic is and how it interacts with the world. Generally, divine magic comes from higher planes of existence, perhaps granted personally by godlike beings. Arcane magic might harness natural energy flows, siphoning power from some phenomenon intrinsic to the world. So, what's the deal with psionics? Sure, they come from within a being's mind, perhaps using their soul as power. But does that fit the DNA of *Dungeons and Dragons*? For many, this is a step too far from Tolkien-inspired fantasy. It does not quite fit the setting expectations, and no manner of rules tweaks will overcome this. At that point, it's up to storytellers to craft a setting where magic and psionics can coexist and less for game designers to balance a ruleset.

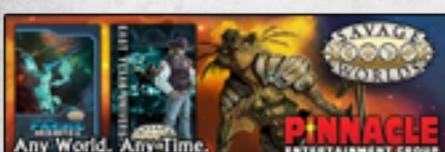
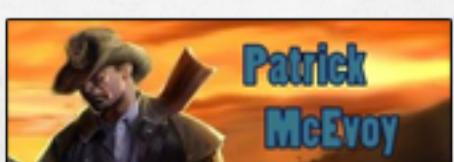
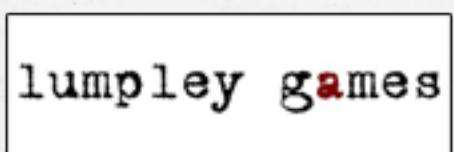
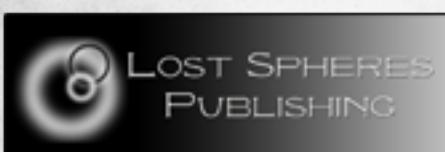
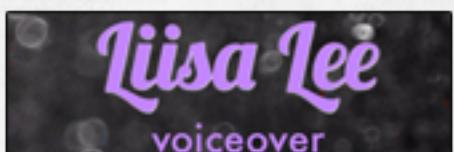


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Q&A: ULISSES NORTH AMERICA

CHRISTOPHER BISHOP
INTERVIEWS
Ross WATSON

Christopher Bishop: So currently you are working on creation and support of Wrath and Glory, a 40k Warhammer Roleplay Game. There have been previous versions of Warhammer 40k games, Rogue Trader, Dark Heresy etc. How does your version of the Warhammer 40k universe differ from these previous products?

Ross Watson: The “Dark Heresy” era of Warhammer 40,000 Roleplay was focused on narrow-but-deep slices of the setting, selecting one particular framework and delving into that over the course of each line. “Wrath & Glory” takes a broader approach. This allows Wrath & Glory to take finite, focused looks at more parts of Warhammer 40,000 that we haven’t seen before in the RPG—for example, we are currently working on a campaign set entirely centered around Craftworld Eldar.

CB: With such a rich background story developed over decades of storytelling, it feels like the 40k storyline is progressing to the end of times, similar to the Warhammer fantasy battle universe that literally blew the world up. How does this impact writing for 40K?

RW: Ulisses North America is working very closely with Games Workshop to mirror the developing story of Warhammer 40,000 in the “Dark Imperium”. Obviously, the 41st Millennium is very different from the events that led to the End Times! That being said, there are some interesting developments in the Dark Imperium—such as the return of Roboute Guilliman—that influence how we write our adventures and setting material for Wrath & Glory.

CB: Reviews of the pdf have certainly run the scale of love to hate, not totally unexpected from a known franchise with 3 decades of backstory attached. Any insight as to how you would handle things differently for new releases?

RW: I think there's definitely value in seeing how people react to your work, particularly with a new design. There are several places where some clarifications or examples would have made understanding the system a bit easier, particularly for character creation, but we are very satisfied with the final product of the core rules. Going forward, we plan to incorporate the lessons we learned from the release of “Wave 1” into the Wrath & Glory line.

CB: Writing for an established intellectual property is much different than writing for something original. How do you feel designing a product with a set history, boundaries and frankly expectations of the product image is versus something where you have more freedom?

RW: The number one design goal for Wrath & Glory is that it is an RPG that has to capture the feel of Warhammer 40,000. We work closely with the Games Workshop licensing team to ensure that our products meet that standard. Working with a license as extensive as Warhammer 40,000, with its strong identity and pedigree, can be a challenge, but it is also very rewarding. As a fan of the grim darkness of the far future, I enjoy helping others tell stories about their heroes in the Dark Imperium.

CB: Obviously, with a universe as morbid as the Dark Imperium, it is really hard to envision everyday life. We always see things from the perspective of the Space Marine or the Eldar or Ork Boyz. Are we going to be given any insight into the everyday universe that an imperial citizen is a part of?

RW: One thing unique about an RPG set in the 41st Millennium is that we get to see the Warhammer 40,000 setting from a different perspective. The characters of Wrath & Glory can exist in many different levels of society—both Imperial and alien. Much of what your game is about depends on the framework you choose for your campaign; a framework is the essence of what your campaign is about—who the characters are, what they're doing, and why.

CB: Explain the mechanic you are using as opposed to the more familiar percentile based mechanic of past Warhammer products?





RW: There is a fantastic 5-page webcomic by Sarah Kaiser (her work is showcased on Warhammer Community!) that goes over the basic mechanics here: <https://www.ulisses-us.com/comic/wg-example-p1>

The short version is that Wrath & Glory uses a d6 dice pool system, where 4's and 5's count as one icon, and 6's count as 2 icons. Add up the

icons on the roll and compare to the difficulty number (DN). One of the dice in the pool is called the Wrath Dice, and it can cause a complication on a result of 1 or add a resource to the group on a result of 6.

CB: How exactly does the tier system work in play? Is it a quick way to set campaign power levels specific to the desires of the group or is it also a term of prowess or advancement measurement for players?

RW: We have a designer diary all about this topic here: <https://www.ulisses-us.com/wrath-glory-designer-diary-december-2017/#more-1819>

The short version is that you set the tier of your game when you decide the framework you want for your campaign. The tier represents the power level of the characters and the challenges they are likely to face. Tiers are not typically expected to be used for advancement, but the option exists for those groups who want to radically progress the story of their campaign.

CB: It looks like pre-orders of the physical copy are slotted for December 2018? Do you plan on doing a big physical release or is mainly going to be print on demand after pre-orders are satisfied?

RW: The pre-orders should be arriving in October. December is what some retailers are currently saying to be safe, but that's for retail release, not our pre-orders. We do only offset printing, no print on demand at all.

CB: How do you see the future of gaming products being released? Mostly in PDF format, a mixture of print on demand, or printing quantities out and storing in a warehouse to slowly ship to vendors and customers?

RW: Ulisses North America releases nearly all products in PDF and physical formats. Our typical timeline is to fulfill pre-orders first, then retail release. PDF releases happen after the pre-order customers have received their digital rewards.

CB: Tell us what you are the most excited for in relation to Wrath & Glory? What products that are coming out really offer something new to longtime fans?

RW: I'm very excited about all the great expansions we have coming down the pipe. There's a lot of great material for the Dark Imperium on the horizon, and just beyond that, the books that focus on the Craftworld Eldar that I mentioned before. That's not to mention some other, unannounced projects that we've got plans for that are, shall we say, insidiously great. Keep an eye on the Ulisses North America website—we'll be talking more about what's new and upcoming for Wrath & Glory there!

Interview by Christopher Bishop who is part of Multiverse!



FEATURED ARTIST Q&A

KAITLIN DAVIES
INTERVIEWS
NICULA MIRCEA

Kaitlin Davies: Tell us about your background as an artist.

Nicula Mircea: I guess my background as an artist is quite similar to other artist's background. I have been drawing for as long as I can remember and I had always been interested in characters and anatomy. I remember being fascinated with 90's animations and action figures and trying to represent in images the characters that inspired me during this period. After this period the second more relevant step in my progress as an artist was attending art's high school.

I was able to attend drawing classes from 5th grade so I spent seven years in high school drawing, painting, and sculpture. Of those disciplines, drawing and sculpture were my main focus and my painting skills were as low as it gets.

Looking back I can see that I was more interested in form and shape than in color and I always had a particular interest in anatomy which wore off only later when it became dull to me. I think I began to get a bit more serious about a career as an artist or at least I began to seriously think about it when I was in 10th grade. I began thinking about becoming a concept artist and I realized that I have to put a lot of time into this if I was to be successful.

Back then Feng Zhu had a big influence on me. I started drawing more hardsurface stuff, creature design, value studies, learning perspective, exploring shapes and overall trying to sharpen the skills I found were necessary for getting an opportunity into this industry. So during this period illustration was not on my list. After I finished high school I decided to attend Sculpture classes in University and I spent five years doing that. In parallel, I continued trying to enhance my skills. Five months ago I got a Master degree in Sculpture and since then I'm working as a freelancer. So you could say that I kept my contact with art my whole life and it is a constitutive an important part of my identity.

KD: Were there any specific artists that really inspired you to follow in their footsteps, so to speak?



NM: Yes, of course. I think that it is the same case with every artist. You always need someone great and inspiring to look up to and a point of reference that you can relate to. The only way to figure if you are good enough is to constantly compare yourself to someone you think achieved greatness. This provides something to strive for and It's a way to keep yourself in check and motivated to be consistent and reach your goals. Some of my favourite artists that inspired me a lot are Anthony Jones, Jaime Jones, Even Mehl Amundsen, Jakun Rozalski, James Zapata, Frank Frazetta, Brom, Avery Coleman and of course Feng Zhu which I already mentioned. These are just some of the names that I find to be quite relevant to me but I have the habit of frantically searching for new artists all the time.

KD: Working habits, do you have a set routine you use to create? Or do you try to be more experimental?

NM: Unfortunately I have a lot of bad art habits that I try to dispense. For example, once I start a piece it's hard for me to stop working on it and I find myself working hours on end without ceasing. Breaks have an import role in working so this has a negative impact on my work and I think it actually messes up with my efficiency. My routine is usually scrolling through a lot of references and images for inspiration than maybe putting some music or podcasts on and after just start working. I can start with a drawing and a general idea or I can just start with value, it depends on what I have in mind for that particular piece and what are its demands. One working pattern that I usually don't dismiss is going from value to color. I like to have a clear sense of light, shape, and perspective first and then add color. I try to experiment as frequent as I can but not so often. Another bad habit that I need to change.

KD: With your character design work, what are your most favorite to create? Do you have a particular "flavor" of character you enjoy working on the most?

NM: When it comes to character design I prefer working on more organic stuff, usually creatures and things that imply flesh and living biological matter. I enjoy designing mechs too but I think overall the balance falls towards designing anatomical characters. As I said I like designing creatures and monsters a lot and also characters that have a medieval flavor to them. I'm leaning more towards fantasy than anything else in terms of design I think.

KD: Do you have a favorite project that you've worked on so far?

NM: The large majority of projects that I had until this point in my life as an artist were personal and I don't really think that I had a favorite one because I worked on them out of passion and I tried approach everyone one of them with enthusiasm and a spirit of learning new things from the respective experience. But from the few projects I worked on, and were commissions or collaborations, I have to say that the illustration I made for AetherCon was pretty fun to do. I think the most fun until now.

KD: What advice would you give to an aspiring artist looking to create eye-catching scenes?

NM: What I try to do is experiment with the light and find a cool shape and composition. I think those three are key to an eye-catching image. My advice would be to study your favorite artist's works of art and find out what makes them so good and interesting to look at.

KD: And lastly, just for a bit of fun – What is one of the best memories, moments or characters you've had in your years of playing games?

NM: I think that one of the most memorable moments I had playing games is from Legacy of Kain: Defiance when Raziel merges with Kain's blade and realizes his destiny thus putting an end to the Wheel of Faith and Elder God's machinations. It's a moment when that big tension between the characters finally gets resolved and they both finally understand the part they had to play in this whole story. There's a nice reconciliation there that moves me every time I think about it. I guess it's because there's this archetypal element of the hero and that Joseph Campbell so eloquently talks about which we find in both characters. Raziel sacrifices himself for a higher cause thus defying the determinism that governs the world and at the same time he finds out that his true purpose was serving in an unselfish manner. Kain's and Raziel's destinies were bound together as allies and not enemies. I found this scene to be very poetic and powerful.

Interview by Kaitlin Davies who is part of The Dice Pool Podcast!



Q&A: AENOR MINIATURES

PETER BRYANT
INTERVIEWS
SYLVAIN QUIRION

Peter Bryant: How did you get started sculpting miniature figures?

Sylvain Quirion: I painted a lot of miniatures and decided to transform some of them. At the time there wasn't so much choice and multipart plastic miniatures to do easy conversions. I also sculpted scenery bases and that kind of things, and then one day I decided to start over an armature and did a complete orc sculpt... I showed the result to a miniature company at a miniature show, gathered a few useful tips, and I was in!

PB: Who is your biggest influence and what work of theirs inspires to this day?

SQ: At the time it was the work of Games Workshop sculptors, especially Jes Goodwin and Brian Nelson. I still admire their work, but now I tend to look for my own way, and I think I've taken some distance from this aesthetic. There are many great sculptors around, whose work is inspirational but they are not necessarily an influence, at least not individually, but they motivate you to improve your own work.

I also take inspiration from sources outside of the miniature world (and not only visual influence). For instance, for the Trolls and Goblins, a big influence was the work of Brian Froud.

PB: Can you briefly explain the process of figure modeling? How does one go from nothing to those cool little figures?

SQ: If it's for my personal range, I generally think about the character I want to sculpt, the design, the pose, and other details like that. Sometimes I draw a rough sketch, but most of the time I just start working on the armature and explore different poses and ideas.

Then I start working on the armature, check if the pose I had in mind or on sketch looks good IRL, twist it a bit, try new ones. Once I have a nice pose for the armature, I start fleshing it out. If I sculpt in epoxy I'll work in layers and area after area. If I sculpt in polymer clay, I'll cover the armature and tend to work all parts at the same time.

PB: Who have you done freelance work for and what has been your favorite project?

SQ: I've done some work for dozens of companies, some outside the usual miniature scene, some not here anymore, but to name a few, I started working for Fenryll, then I did a few miniatures for Fanatic Games (GW's Specialist Games department at the time), and later worked for many companies, including Reaper, Neomics, Wreck-Age, Kingdom Death, Mantic, Eden, a few board games companies... but I've also done many miniatures for collectibles or toy companies.

Of course, working on some Mordheim miniatures early in my career was very cool. Sculpting for Kingdom Death when they started was also great, and it was maybe a milestone in my sculpting, seeing what they did next is really impressive and I regret I didn't have time to sculpt more minis for them at the time. I've worked on many other cool ranges over the years.

But the most exciting project was my own Goblin range, Goblins are my favourite subject to sculpt, and I had total freedom, and could explore it deeper than ever. But I still



have many ideas and will come back to it!

PB: What drives your passion for miniature sculpting?

SQ: I like to create characters, develop them in three dimensions, but not just as single sculptures. I also like imagining universes or stories and try to make my characters consistent as groups, so that they belong to the same world.

PB: Has Kickstarter affected how you do business and if so how?

SQ: Kickstarter was already an important component of the miniature market when I launched Aenor, so it didn't change how I was operating, but I had to take it into account. Things would have been quite different if I had started my range 5, 10 or 15 years ago. KS helps you fund new ranges, estimate the demand and creates synergy in a way you couldn't do before. It's a powerful marketing tool and it helps launch complete ranges at once. But also, as it makes it easier to launch new projects, it involves a lot of competition and it's very difficult to even get some visibility sometimes. The Internet made it easier for the little guys to start, getting the right contacts and showing their product to the world, but with KS it's like anyone can start a miniature company! It was maybe easier in the first years, back then even small companies could have great results. Now I think people are more careful about what they back, because some projects haven't delivered what they had promised, and there are really many projects competing against each other, including some big companies with very large projects (though even they seem to suffer from the competition at times). Some very cool small projects have been struggling or even failing.

I've heard some people say you can't do it without KS, I don't think it's true. You can also skip Kickstarter and produce miniatures the old way, build things slowly. KS can be stressful, it is really a lot of work and your margins are lower. Skipping crowdfunding seems to work for some companies.

PB: Where is the most surprising place that you've sold miniatures to?

SQ: I can't say I've been surprised by any place I have sold miniatures to, as I know there are some miniature artists there, but the less usual or most « exotic » places are maybe Brasil and Malaysia.

PB: How many figures in your stock, and how much do you see this growing over the next couple of years?

SQ: I also have a small aliens range (probably more humoristic than horrific). I hope by the time this interview is published I'll have the Trolls and Goblins in the shop, so that would be 46 different models. I'd like to add about 20, maybe 30 new models every year. But building a range of miniatures alone is a long process!

PB: Will you be expanding your figures to include other genres?

SQ: Yes, I'd like to, I have ideas for modern figures outside of the horror range, and maybe science fiction models, but that's not something I can do in the short future, I don't want to disperse my efforts too much.

Interview by Peter Bryant at Multiverse!



Q&A: MYSTICAL THRONE ENTERTAINMENT

SCOTT SANAZARO
INTERVIEWS
AARON HUSS

Scott Sanazaro: Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got into tabletop RPGs?

Aaron Huss: At the age of 40, I find myself quite busy. I spend my full-time job in the electronics, engineering, and manufacturing industry, and my time at home with my wife and our six children (ages 2-14). Technically my foray into RPGs came from my love of Choose Your Own Adventure™ books and Final Fantasy™ video games in elementary school, but my tabletop interests were piqued due to my love of the Warhammer 40k™ universe (which led me to Dark Heresy and the true re-discovery of tabletop RPGs). I then wholly absorbed myself into the hobby and found not only a love for gaming but an outlet for my writing.

SS: Tell me a little about Mystical Throne Entertainment.

AH: Mystical Throne Entertainment is my personal outlet for my writing. I publish primarily tabletop RPGs with a very small selection of fiction. My inspiration simply comes from my love of the weird (fantasy horror, cosmic horror, dark fantasy, gothic sci-fi, etc.) and my obsession with history. It officially started in early 2011 when I first pitched the idea of Savage Insider, but it unofficially started a couple years before that when I started brainstorming my own settings. At Mystical Throne Entertainment, the motto is "Bringing new worlds to your tabletop". In short, that means I love to explore outside of the norms and venture off wherever the heart desires. This is as opposed to worrying so much about what's popular, what genres sell the best, and what draws the most attention. Instead, we develop what we love and love what we develop!

SS: Mystical Throne Entertainment has quite a few different game settings. Are these all from the same brain, or are there collaborations between multiple people?

AH: Technically none of the settings are free. We have Quick Start Guides for most of our settings, but they only provide a look at the whole setting (or system) so that potential fans know what they're getting before spending any money. Actual settings (as opposed to sourcebooks that can be used as settings) all come from my own mind except for Mythos. Gilbert Gallo is the IP owner and developer of Mythos. Years ago he approached me about publishing an English, Savage Worlds version of his Italian RPG Mythos. I love history and mythology and was ecstatic to be his publisher (and editor). Many of our non-setting books are written by freelancers as well as the Savage Insider magazines.

SS: How many settings can be found on Mystical Throne Entertainment website?

AH: 1) Mythos, 2) Mercenary Breed, 3) Ancient World, 4) Little Heroes, 5) Five Points, 6) Portsmouth 1745, and 7) Shadowed Earth (which includes Judgment Day, Beyond the Firelight, Faith & Demons: The Rising, Cryptozoology, and the upcoming "The Fallen")

SS: Do you have a favorite setting you find yourself drawn to the most?

AH: For writing, it's Shadowed Earth. This is my all-era-spanning, fantasy horror version of Earth where folklore and mythology are made real and given a purpose. Shadowed Earth allows me to tell a very, very long story while incorporating my love of history and



the weird. For inspiration, I'm drawn to anything Cthulhu-related. Lately, I've been reading The Laundry Files novels and love them!

SS: Can you tell me some of the RPG systems that Mystical Throne Entertainment has supplements for and about the supplements themselves?

AH: 1) Colonial Gothic - Richard Iorio of Rogue Games, the brains behind Colonial Gothic, is a publishing acquaintance of mine and I love his system. I decided to write a campaign with a setting for a game I was going to run and asked for a limited license to publish it. It's actually set in Portsmouth, NH, in 1745 that includes a full setting guide and the campaign.

2) Dark Streets - Peter Cakebread and Ken Walton, the brains behind Dark Streets, are also publishing acquaintances of mine. I've always wanted to do a weird version of Five Points in New York City, and their Dark Streets was a perfect fit! This turned into a full setting that requires the Dark Streets core rulebook to play.

3) Savage Worlds - Other than settings, I have a line of products called Ultimate Guides. These sourcebooks center on a single theme and provide a compact offering of that theme. Many of them feature historical cultures (such as Vikings, Celts, Roman Legions, and Feudal Japan) while others focus on concepts (such as The Fey Realm) or mechanics (such as Ground Warfare).

4) Entropic Gaming System - This is the system I designed for heroic gameplay that offers a lot more character flexibility. My Ultimate Guides are available in EGS versions along with a collection of supplements and adventures.

SS: Do you have a favorite RPG system that you use (D&D™, Pathfinder, Savage Worlds, etc).

AH: Nope! I like to tailor the RPG system to the experience I want to have. If I want to play vanilla fantasy, I prefer D&D or Pathfinder. If I want high action, I might choose Savage Worlds or Ubiquity. If I want horror, I might choose Call of Cthulhu or Dark Heresy. If I want deadly combat, I might choose Legend or Renaissance. I like so many RPG systems, that I could probably write a book just talking about them!

SS: Who illustrates the artwork on the supplements and settings?

AH: It really depends on the supplement. A lot of it is stock art specifically chosen to match the content, but I also call upon Andrew DeFelice and Carlos Torreblanca for those specialty pieces!

SS: Any exciting things on the horizon for Mystical Throne Entertainment?

AH: Right now I'm writing "The Fallen", a Powered by the Apocalypse game set in Shadowed Earth where you become a supernatural creature joining the ranks of The Fallen, fighting the absolute worst beings within the Shadowed Earth canon. This has been a really fun book to write and the PbtA mechanics really capture the theme I always wanted in this setting.

SS: Anything else you'd like to share that I may not have asked about?

AH: I have plans in the near future to explore other game systems and develop more PbtA games. I like to match a game system with the setting to truly represent the experience I would like the players to have. Heroic games should have heroic systems; survival games should have unforgiving systems; dramatic games should have dramatic systems. You get the point... If the gaming experience of a setting doesn't match the style of the system, then it feels awkward and lacks cohesiveness. Technical writing has been a part of my career for the past 16 years, and I learned that you always need to write for your audience. When I heard a fictional author (at a Gen Con seminar) make the statement that writing RPGs is like technical writing, it was then that I realized I need to apply the same principles to RPGs - write for your audience. As such, I will always be open to finding just the right system for the settings I want to share with the world! So don't expect me to find a comfort zone; expect me to explore the hobby and support my fellow publishers at the same time!

Interview by Scott Sanazaro who runs and manages The Goblin Gazette!



Q&A: SPECTRUM GAMES

CHRISTOPHER BISHOP
INTERVIEWS
CYNTHIA MILLER

Christopher Bishop: Give us a little history of both yourself and your company? When did you get started?

Cynthia Miller: I grew up in a small town in southeast Kansas with only a few other tabletop gamers. By the age of 13, game design had become my greatest passion, which led to my first RPG, Inter-Galactic Wars (which changed to "Inner-Galactic Wars" at one point, for reasons I don't remember). IGW was a hackneyed mishmash of just about every property known to humankind, ranging from Star Wars™ to—of all things—The Private Eyes (Wookalairs, anyone?). The system was terrible, but my friends loved it. I was ecstatic that people were getting enjoyment from what I created. I began to crave that. In the years that followed, I sent out submissions to just about every company I could think of. My box of rejection letters grew, but that only made me more determined. When PDF publishing became a viable means of getting one's game out there, I jumped in head first by co-establishing Spectrum Games in late 2001, publishing Cartoon Action Hour in 2002 and catching the eye of Z-Man Games, who offered to publish it as an honest-to-gosh book. We eventually parted ways amicably with Z-Man and stepped out into the world of full-on self-publishing.

CB: So what inspired you to get into the roleplaying game market; specific games you sought to emulate, or a desire to do something you were not seeing?

CM: I was inspired initially by the simple joy of seeing others play my games, but several games proved truly instrumental shortly thereafter, starting with Star Wars™(WEG) and Marvel Superheroes™ in 1987. These games demonstrated that a system could be constructed in such a way that it could accurately portray the source material. That was a massive revelation to me.

CB: Your products espouse the term **Genre Emulation**. For those readers that are unsure of the term could explain what this means?

CM: Genre emulation is the act of faithfully evoking the feel and spirit of a given genre with careful and meticulous creation of the game's rules. For example, in Cartoon Action Hour, a huge gun capable of blasting tanks to smithereens won't do much damage to non-robot characters. Why? Because in the 1980s cartoons, such guns never scored direct hits on people. Instead, the gun's blast would hit near the character and the impact would send them careening into a wall or other object. Another example is from On the Air. The game emulates Old Time Radio, so characters have to narrate their characters' actions as if they were in a radio show with a combination of dialogue and sound effects (*knocks on the table* "Gee, there's a knock at the door. I'd better answer it"). All of our games are full of these things, making the genre come to life for you and your group.

CB: I notice that most of your systems while having similar flow use different mechanics. Is this deliberate due to the nature of the media you emulate?

CM: Three of our games use a system we call the "Intention System", which was originated by Barak Blackburn, though each version of it is wildly different. But, yes, the others have very different systems, which is usually required to cover all the nuances of the different genres. What works well for 1980s action cartoons wouldn't be so suitable for film noir. Or Old Time Radio. You get the idea.

CB: What is the most challenging part of creating games?

CM: Before we tackle a genre, even ones we're already extremely well versed in, we do an insane amount of research to make sure we leave no stone unturned. The notes we take

Spectrum Games

- 1980s action cartoons
- Anthology-style horror
- 1970s sci-fi television
- 1970s and '80s "death sport" sci-fi movies
- "psycho killer" movies
- Lovecraftian horror
- Old Time Radio
- superhero comics
- 1940s and '50s film noir

The **Genre Emulation Specialists**

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are comprehensive, to say the least. As an example, when preparing for Slasher Flick, I would watch kill scenes and kept records of all the aspects—how long they lasted, how many attacks it took for the killer to finish off the victim, how many involved a lengthy pursuit sequence versus how many were over almost as soon as they began, how often the would-be victim got away, etc.

CB: How do you feel products available in both pdf and print-on-demand work for smaller publishing houses?

CM: I feel they are crucial for small press game companies, along with crowdfunding. I'm not exaggerating when I say that these avenues completely changed the game industry. By minimizing publisher buy-in, the field has become open to a lot more creatives who have amazing ideas but not necessarily a lot of money to invest. These creatives are producing amazing material!

CB: What is coming down the line for Spectrum Games?

CM: Our next big product is the aforementioned miniatures game, Urban Manhunt, which emulates the “dark future” films of the late 1970s and early ‘80s, most notably The Running Man, Escape from New York and The Warriors. We wanted to publish a miniatures game that can be played without a huge investment. You basically need one miniature. Each player takes on the role of a hunter, who scours sectioned off parts of prison cities, eliminating convicts (called crims) for points. The hunter with the most points accumulated when the time limit expires wins the match. The crims are controlled by the game system itself, instituting a refreshingly different game-play dynamic than the my-team-fights-your-team set-up most gamers are accustomed to.

CB: Okay, time for some fun questions based on what I see on your website:

- a) Your favorite superhero and why?
- b) Your favorite Slasher Movie and why?
- c) Your favorite 1980's Cartoon and why?

CM: a) Captain Ultra because he amuses me and I love that he's just a balding, middle-aged plumber who is afraid of fire and happens to have these amazing powers. That appeals to me.

b) It's a tie between Halloween (1978) and Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon. Halloween was the one that got me started in slasher movie fandom when it was first released. I saw it at the drive-in with my parents and I fell in love with it immediately. So, there's a lot of nostalgia involved. With Behind The Mask, it did what I did with Slasher Flick: it deconstructed the entire genre to see what made it tick. It was an ingenious movie.

c) Thundarr the Barbarian by a wide margin. It had such an eerie atmosphere, which was something you didn't see in cartoons of the era. And it had the perfect balance of science and sorcery. Thundarr holds up shockingly well, almost 40 years later. Not all shows can make that claim.

CB: Looking over your library one could say you are firmly lodged in the awesomeness that was the 1980's. How do you go about deciding what to work on?

CM: While we all love the '80s, I'm not sure all our product lines are tied so closely to the era, aside from Cartoon Action Hour and our upcoming tabletop miniatures game, Urban Manhunt. We cover numerous genres ranging from Lovecraftian horror set in the 1920s and '30s to the science fiction television shows of the 1970s, not to mention Stories from the Grave, which goes all over the place in terms of eras (1950s-era horror comics to modern anthology films). We essentially choose our genres based on what we love and what we feel we can do justice to. If I'm not passionate about something, I have a hard time turning out high-quality material.

Interview by Christopher Bishop who is part of Multiverse!



Q&A: ROGUE GENIUS GAMES

JAMES INTROCASO
INTERVIEWS
OWEN STEPHENS

James Introcaso: Rogue Genius Games supports many different RPG systems: D&D™, Savage Worlds, and ICONs. What do you love about supporting and creating new material for multiple systems?

Owen Stephens: I'm a huge fan of games in general, and RPGs in particular. I love exploring how different games tackle the same questions of design. Do characters gain in power and if so how? Does money equal power, and if not why not? Are characters balanced against each other, and if so is it in terms of effectiveness or in the amount of spotlight time? Not every game system is going to be the right fit for every genre or game, or even every gamer. By supporting more than one system I can explore their different design philosophies, appeal to different audiences, and work with different great creators!

Jl: Rogue Genius Games supplies a lot of quality stock art for super affordable prices for independent creators. Why did you get into the stock art game and how would you describe the style of your available art?

OS: Early in my publishing career I worked with smaller game companies that aren't around anymore, IDA and Super Genius Games in particular, and saw how they used stock art to great effect. Lowering the barrier to entry helps new creatives get experience, and makes for a broader market for the end user. So when some artists expressed interest in having RGG publish their stock art, it seemed like a great way to help support other people and groups who were trying to break into the industry and make money at the same time.

Anytime I can both genuinely help people and make money, I see that as a win-win situation.

Jl: You employ a lot of amazing creators like Christina Styles, Dan Dillon, Rich Howard, and Stephen Rowe to name a few. How do you find new people to work with?

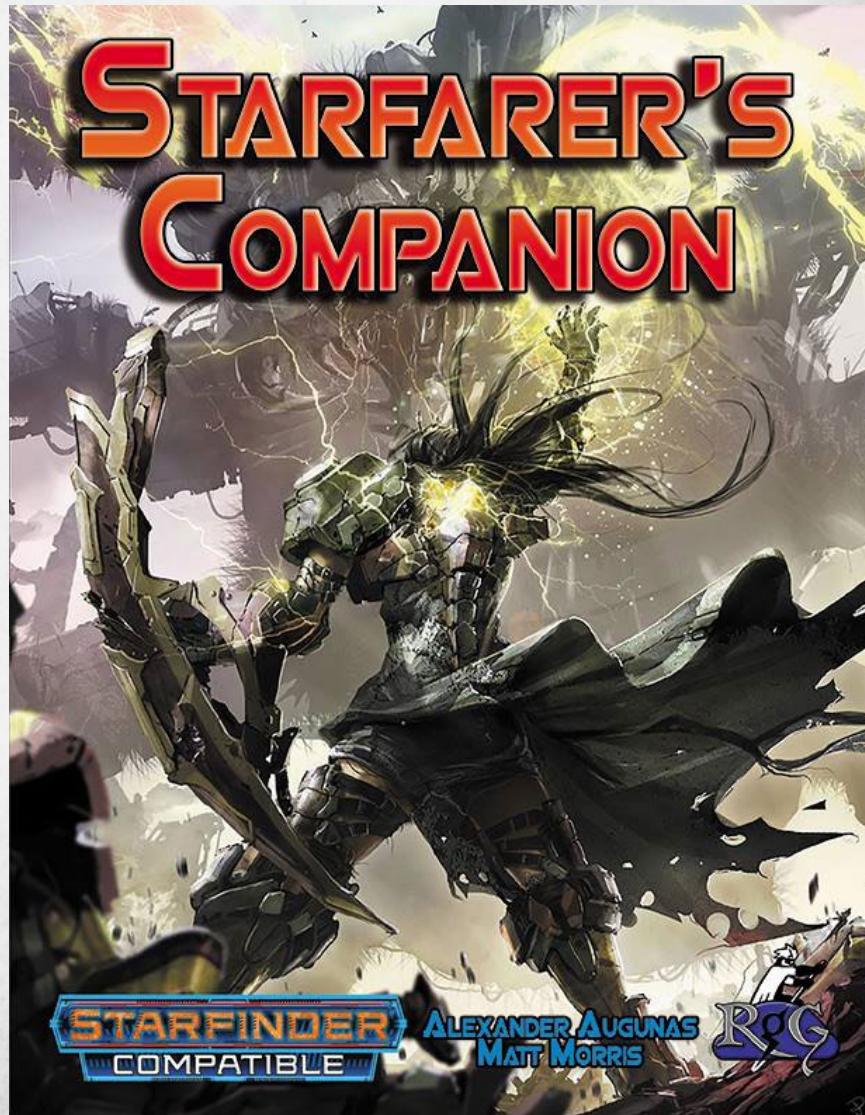
OS: I'd add artist Jacob Blackmon, publisher Alex Augunas, and graphic designer Lj Stephens to that list. Honestly, most of them find me. I have been very fortunate to have so many talented people interested in working with me. In fact, generally the limitation is not finding awesome people, it's finding time to work with them all!

I've been active in the industry for more than twenty years, and I try to be very visible on social media. I go to conventions and pass out a ton of business cards. Thankfully, those efforts have made me easy to find and remember as someone who wants to work with folks.

Jl: You work with "Stan!" who is a big name in D&D. You're a big name in Pathfinder. How did you get started working together?

OS: It actually began in 1997, at the TSR Writer's Workshop in Seattle (at the much-lamented Wizards of the Coast Game Center). I was a participant, and Stan! was one of the presenters. After one of the sessions, I saw Stan! and Ted Stark having lunch at the attached restaurant, Dalmuti's, and asked if I could join them. We talked about their experiences in publishing and gaming in general.

I sent them both thank you cards after the workshop ended.



A couple of years later, I got hired at Wizards of the Coast as a game designer and Stan! and Ted both still worked there. Stan! and I got along well, and my wife and I had him over to watch the DVD of Big Trouble in Little China.

After Stan! and I had both moved on from Wizards of the Coast, he contacted me about writing a Call of Cthulhu adventure for Super Genius Games, and I accepted. After that, I began writing Pathfinder-compatible material for SGG, and our working relationship solidified. He's one of the partners in Rogue Genius Games now, for which I am the publisher.

JI: What are some of your favorite RGG products currently available?

OS: I'm very proud of our Starfinder-compatible products, especially the Starfarer's Companion, and Starfarer's Codex: Multiclass Theme Types. Those both look to expand the Starfinder RPG in ways I find fun and interesting. I also love Jacob Blackmon's Super Powered Legends Sourcebook, for Mutants and Masterminds, which he wrote and illustrated. It's a whole superhero world you can use as-is or draw from to populate your own campaigns. Of course, RGG also publishes material by Everman Gaming, who have the tremendously popular Skill Challenge Handbook, which gives expanded skill encounter rules for the Pathfinder RPG.

Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Writing With Style, by Ray Vallesse. It's a collection of advice for RPG writers from an RPG editor with decades of experience, and it's system-agnostic. It's one of the best things I think we've ever published, and I learned a lot from it.

JI: What are you working on now that we should look forward to?

OS: My biggest currently advancing project that has things people can look at already is Really Wild West, which is a weird Wild West setting hack for Starfinder. I've been developing it on my blog, and people can give feedback there or through my Patreon page.

JI: How do you think the industry is changing?

OS: I think the biggest change currently is the rise of streaming in regards to tabletop gaming. Numerous groups have real-play shows, where they do production levels from totally hobby level to professional shows, with things such as Critical Role and Titansgrave perhaps being the best known. There are tons of other shows, including those that play through Starfinder and Pathfinder games, those that discuss nerddom in general, and broadcasts directly from game companies, such as Paizo's Twitch stream which has interviews and play sessions both. I even do my own tiny stream, The Aftergame, Tuesday nights from my Facebook page.

Even a decade ago, the idea that there would be multiple, popular shows about watching people play RPGs was laughable, but that's the direction the market has gone. Streaming is a way to showcase games, connect with audiences, and use an art form to entertain in a way that RPGs did not previously. I think the rise of streaming is going to drive decisions and success for the foreseeable future until the next big, unexpected change comes along.

Interview by James Introcaso who is the owner of World Builder Blog and Don't Split the Podcast Network!



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FUNNIEST GAMING STORY EVER!

WRITTEN BY EDWARD CLOWER

I have run a lot of adventures, but I have one in particular in which every time I have run it no one ever confronts the Big Bad Evil Guy in the end.

In previous AetherCons I have run an adventure for first edition AD&D called The Merchant of Kwan Lun. I have since retired the adventure, so it is safe to reveal its secrets now. The opening premise was pretty simple; an ancient-looking merchant in a local bazaar asks the party to retrieve some water from a magical pool that is purported to have remarkable restorative qualities. The pool is located in an abandoned temple not too far away. If the party will get the water for the old merchant they will be rewarded handsomely.

The twist is that the Merchant of Kwan Lun has rigged this old abandoned temple. The way that he replenishes his shop is that he asks unsuspecting adventurers to go get some water from the “magical pool” in the temple, which he has stocked with traps that are designed to separate the party from their worldly possessions. There are water traps that are designed to get the party to shed their heavy armor. There are goblins who are paid to steal from the party or knock them out and take their gear. There are some traps that are only there to mess with the players’ minds. My personal favorite has a viscous substance at the base of a set of stairs. Clever party members will examine it and discover that it is rendered bacon grease. The party will step over it, thinking that they have thwarted the trap. However, the stair treads fold downward as the party reaches the top, forming a ramp instead of stairs. Any party member that trips slides down and gets lightly coated with bacon grease. The ramp is not all that difficult to navigate, but at the top of the stairs is a trigger for a small gust of wind that blows a dust-like substance on the party which sticks to the grease. Observant party members will discover that they are now coated with a blend of eleven herbs and spices. You can imagine where their minds go from there.

The final encounter of the adventure is in the “sacred chambers” of the temple. Having navigated through the traps and guardians, a young man in acolyte robes tells the party that they have proved themselves worthy to visit the mystical pool. All they must do now is go through the ceremonial cleansing so as not to contaminate the sacred pool. I have only had one party actually get to this point. They are instructed to place their belongings in the chest against the wall, place the key around their neck, and proceed to the next room where they will bathe and be given the ceremonial robes. The acolyte is of course the Merchant of Kwan Lun, a doppelganger or illusionist (depending on the level of the party). The sacred pool is ordinary water containing a couple of water weirds.

As I previously stated, I have only had one party make it to this point. The adventure is not overly deadly, but it is rather humiliating at times. But this party, having overcome a myriad of traps, robbing goblins, and a few creatures that actually wanted to eat them, reached the inner chamber and were told to put their armor and weapons in a chest and take the key with them. And they did it. One of them did manage to sneak an empty vial in with him. I didn’t ask where he was keeping it.

They were led in to the room with the sacred pool. I am fully prepared for them to put up a valiant fight, in spite of their lack of weapons, spell components, or delicate unmentionables. The Merchant is in the next room getting the spare key to the chests so he can grab their gear and appraise it. The guy with the vial shoves it under the surface to fill it with water. The moment of truth arrives. The snakelike water creatures begin to rise from the pool.

And they run.

The party flees out a door into the woods, one of them clutching the vial. They run through the wilderness and straight into the center of town, as naked as the day they were born. Needless to say, the customers and merchants of the Bazaar find this highly amusing. The party, however, now has to come to grips with the fact that the Merchant of Kwan Lun is not there. His tent, his goods, all gone like he was never there. Eventually someone will explain that the Merchant packed his shop mere moments after the party left. And in the end, having made their way through the adventure, they are left with nothing but a vial of water.



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